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The Man Outside

Helen Bagg

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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

The Man Outside

A Farce in One Act

By

HELEN BAGG

Author of "First Aid," "Let's All Get Married," "Looking for Mary Jane," "Untangling Tony," etc.

PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1918

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The Man Outside

CHARACTERS

JAMES MCARTHUR - - -	*a young novelist, and a bridegroom*
FREDERICK FANNING - -	*the bride's brother, and the best man*
SALLY WEST - - - - -	*the maid of honor*
BARNES - - - - - - -	*the butler*

TIME OF PLAYING.—Forty-five minutes.

STORY OF THE PLAY

The action takes place on the eve of James McArthur's wedding day. He tells Freddy, his prospective brother-in-law, that he is counting on the advance royalties from his novel to pay for the wedding trip to Palm Beach. Then he gets a letter from his publishers—without a check. "I must have five hundred dollars before to-morrow night!" They decide to pawn the wedding silver. Freddy is to put the silver in a bag and pass it out the window to McArthur.

Sally West returns from a dance and meets Freddy, with the "swag." "It—it's my laundry!" Sally and Freddy find they're interested in each other. Sally hears the jingle of the silver in the bag and suspects Barnes, the butler, of trying to smuggle it outside to a confederate. Freddy undertakes to find out. "Suppose he kills you!" Sally defends Freddy from harm by taking the silver away.

McArthur, outside the window, threatens awful things to Freddy. Barnes unconsciously absolves himself from guilt and shifts it to Freddy. Sally is hysterical. "You—you—living lie!" McArthur, desperate, "steals" the silver himself. Then an opportune remittance saves the day, and McArthur determines to write detective stories instead of love stories. "Just so you leave Freddy out, you may do as you please!"

COSTUMES

JAMES MCARTHUR, about twenty-five. Dark business suit.

FREDERICK FANNING, about twenty-five. Business suit.

SALLY WEST, about twenty. Evening dress.

BARNES. Butler's uniform.

PROPERTIES

For McArthur: Overcoat, cane, hat, cigarette, bunch of keys, papers, unopened letter, ring, handkerchief.

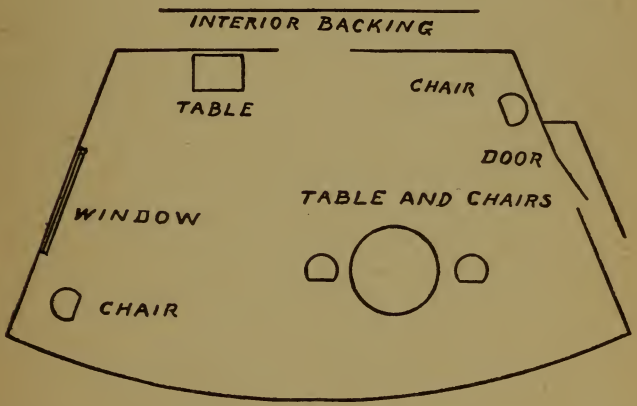
For Fanning: Soft hat, striped laundry bag, pocket knife, key.

For Sally: Evening wrap.

For Barnes: Telegram, tray with coffee, cups, and sandwiches.

Other Properties: Several pieces of silver wrapped in a kimono; knives and forks; box containing ugly china ornament and card; bell to ring off stage.

SCENE PLOT



Scene.—The library of the Fanning house, at about eleven o'clock in the evening, the night before the wedding of the daughter of the house. At c. a doorway leading to the hall; at l. a doorway, curtained, connecting with a smoking-room or den; at r. a window. A library table with a chair at r. and at l. of it. Another chair near the door at l. A small table at r. c. with an express package on it.

The Man Outside

SCENE.—*The library of the Fanning house. Doors up* C. *and at* L. *Window* R. *Table and chairs* L. C. *Chairs at* R. *and* L.

(*At rise of curtain* McARTHUR, *up* C., *has just been helped into his coat by* BARNES, *who holds stick and hat.*)

BARNES (*up* R. C.). If I may say so, sir, I wish you and Miss Edith hevery sort of good luck in your married life, sir.

MAC. Thank you, Barnes.

(*He comes down to table* C. *for a match and lights his cigarette.*)

BARNES. There will be so much hexcitement tomorrow night, sir, with the wedding and all, I thought I might not 'ave a chance to mention it.

MAC. (*radiantly, at table* C.). Yes, yes, of course—of course we'll be happy! Any fool could be happy with a girl like Miss Edith, eh, Barnes?

BARNES. I should think he might, sir.

MAC. Even a literary guy, eh?

BARNES (*up* R. C.). I should think so, sir; though of course my hinformation as to the ways of that profession is very limited. You, sir, are the only hauthor I've ever met; of course, Mr. Frederick being a hartist ——

MAC. (*walking up* R. C. *to* BARNES). Not the same sort of thing at all, Barnes. Artists are born lucky. Rich widows are always marrying 'em or else they have wealthy fathers like Freddy, or —— (*He notices*

the box on small table R. C.) Hello, more wedding presents?

BARNES (*handing him hat and stick*). Yes, sir; Miss Edith said she wasn't going to hopen any more till after the wedding. We're all completely wore out, sir.

(*Enter* FREDDY, L.)

MAC. I am. Been opening 'em all evening. Hello, Freddy! (*Comes down* L.)

(*Exit* BARNES, C.)

FREDDY (*coming down* L. *to* MAC., *maliciously*). Edith says you're to go home at once and go to bed. You're not to stop at the club because they'll keep you up late, and she wants you to look happy to-morrow night. Fat chance you've got to look happy—walking down a church aisle with five hundred people grinning at you! Gosh, I pity you!

MAC. (*defiantly*). I dare say I'll pull it off. It's been managed before.

FREDDY. Oh, you'll pull it off all right. I'm thinking of myself—walking down back of you, with a girl on my arm! It's the longest aisle in Chicago.

MAC. (*soothingly*). No it isn't; you only imagine it.

FREDDY. Oh, do I? I walked up that aisle once when I was a kid; they made me carry the infant class banner; and I know. I'd rather carry fifty banners than haul a maid of honor. Gosh, I hate girls!

MAC. You don't hate 'em—you're afraid of 'em. It's a very different thing. (*More confidentially.*) I don't mind telling you, though, that I am a bit nervous. There seem to be so many things that may go wrong.

FREDDY (*bitterly*). That will go wrong.

MAC. (L. C.). There's the ring, and the license, and the clergyman's fee—it seems a good deal to trust to you.

FREDDY (L.). Do 'em yourself, then. You can take Sally West on your other arm coming down the aisle, if you want to. I don't mind.

MAC. Seems to me you're rather familiar with the front name of a girl you hate.

FREDDY. Oh, I don't hate her, especially. That is, I wouldn't, if she hadn't treated me like a toad ever since she's been visiting in the house.

MAC. She hasn't. She's not the sort of girl to run after a fellow, if that's what you mean.

FREDDY. I guess I know when a girl takes a human interest in me and when she doesn't. Every time Edith gets a crush on a girl it means that I've got to haul her around and show her a good time whether she likes me or not.

MAC. It's Edith's adorable nature.

FREDDY. You can call it that if you like. You've never had to entertain the girls. (*With unholy joy.*) You will, though, now!

MAC. Humph!

FREDDY. How long have you and Edie been engaged?

MAC. About three months.

FREDDY. That's the rotten thing about engagements. They make 'em so short that you don't have a chance to learn anything about the other fellow. If I'm ever engaged, I shall insist upon a five-year engagement.

MAC. (*fervently*). Nothing that I could ever learn in this world or the next about your sister Edith could ever alter my belief that she is the sweetest, prettiest, and best girl that the good Lord ever threw in the path of an unworthy, literary lummox!

FREDDY. Humph!

MAC. Trouble with you, Freddy, is that you're shy. Every time a girl looks at you you think she's finding fault with you. Now, just as likely as not she's admiring you; admiring the fit of your clothes—no, not the fit of your clothes—but your—well, your general worth. So long, Freddy—cheer up! (*Starts up* C.)

FREDDY. Oh, I'll weather it, somehow. Say, where's that ring? Hadn't you better give it to me before we forget it?

MAC. (*coming back to* L. C.). Good idea!

(*Goes through his pockets for the ring; turns out several other things, including a letter.*)

FREDDY (*worried*). Well, I hope you haven't lost it already?

MAC. (*finding it; tossing it to* FREDDY). Here it is. I knew I'd bought it, but I'm so confoundedly absent-minded! Why, here's this letter—been in my pocket since day before yesterday, and I haven't opened it.

FREDDY (*putting ring into his pocket*). Important?

MAC. Rather! It's my publishers' check for advance royalties on my new novel, "The Silver Circle." This check, my boy, is going to finance your sister's wedding trip to Palm Beach.

FREDDY (*enviously*). Golly! They treat you pretty well, don't they?

MAC. They'd better treat me well. Took 'em long enough to discover me.

FREDDY. Wish they'd pay advance royalties on pictures.

MAC. (*contemptuously*). Pictures!

FREDDY. Well, open it. I'd like to see what a check looks like these days. (MAC. *opens letter—shakes envelope.*) What's the matter?

MAC. There doesn't seem to be any check. Maybe it's inside.

(*Spreads out the letter. A look of horror comes into his face.*)

FREDDY. What's it say?

MAC. (*handing it to him*). You read it, Freddy; my eyes feel funny.

FREDDY (*reading*). "Dear McArthur: Are in receipt of the 'Silver Circle.' The verdict is that while the book is quite up to your mark in most respects, the love interest weakens toward the end. Study the last five chapters with this idea in mind and let us know what you think of warming them up a bit. Yours as ever, Jones & Everett."

MAC. Well? What does it say about the check?

FREDDY. Nothing. Check seems to have weakened like the love interest.

MAC. (*snatching the letter*). "Study the last five chapters!" Precious lot of time I've got to study love interest when I've got to put in all my time for the next twenty-four hours getting married.

(*Crumples up letter, throws it on floor and stalks about stage.*)

FREDDY (*unconcerned*). Put it off till you get home.

MAC. (*up* C.). Till I get home? Freddy, I can't go! I can't get married! I'm broke!

FREDDY (*startled*). Broke!

MAC. (*coming down* R.). Oh, I've got enough to pay the parson and get to the depot—what good will that do me? I've got to go to Palm Beach. I've got to have at least five hundred dollars before this time to-morrow night, do you hear?

FREDDY. Gosh!

MAC. (*shaking his fist bitterly*). I've been counting on these people—trusting them—and this is how they treat me in my hour of need!

FREDDY (*doubtfully*). We might approach father?

MAC. No. When I asked your sister to marry me I made her promise to live on my income. I said one artistic loafer in the family was enough. I wouldn't even let him furnish the flat. That's why I'm broke. That's what comes of being proud and self-respecting! Even your publishers step on you when they get the chance! (*Throws himself into chair* R. C.)

FREDDY. If I had anything, old man ——

MAC. Nobody that I can borrow from has anything—nobody! Here I am, literally surrounded by expensive wedding presents, and not enough to get married on! I've unwrapped enough silver this very evening to keep Edith and me in luxury for six months, and what good will it do me? Unless —— (*Pause.*)

FREDDY. Unless what? I don't imagine you're proposing to steal the wedding silver, are you?

MAC. (*solemnly*). Come here, Freddy. (FREDDY *crosses* R. *to him.*) Sit down. (FREDDY *pulls the*

chair at R. *of table beside* MAC.'S *and sits.*) Now listen! To whom, in your opinion, do those wedding presents belong?

FREDDY. To Edie, of course.

MAC. Why?

FREDDY. Aren't they marked with her initials?

MAC. A mere formality. Done in case the bride changes her mind at the last minute and wants to marry another fellow. Edith isn't going to change her mind. As soon as the ceremony is over to-morrow night those presents are half mine. (FREDDY *listens in fascinated horror.*) Some of 'em are mine now. Look at the stuff Joe Temple's sent. Why? Because Joe and I went to college together—same frat. Don't you suppose he sent those diamond hairpins to me?

FREDDY. Well, why not go up and ask Edie, now?

MAC. No. I'm not going to have her confidence in me shaken. It's the one beautiful thing in my life and I'm not going to lose it—anyhow, not till we're married. Listen, Freddy, this is up to you.

FREDDY (*horrified*). Me!

MAC. (*pleadingly*). Freddy, one armful of that silver in the proper hands by midnight to-night would mean two weeks at Palm Beach. It isn't much to ask a chap to do for his only sister!

FREDDY (*alarmed*). No, sir!

MAC. It isn't as though it was going for good, Freddy. I'll take it to that guy where you pawned my watch the night I took you and Edith to the opera and left my wad home on the piano, remember? And the minute my next check comes in I'll redeem it!

FREDDY. I don't care about your part. What have I got to do?

MAC. Just slip into Edith's sitting-room—she's got 'em all laid out—grab up some of the heavy pieces, and some spoons and a diamond or two, and shoot 'em out to me; I'll be outside this window. It won't do to try it here, with Barnes pussyfooting all over the place.

FREDDY. You seem to have the details down pat.

MAC. Of course I have. I have to know how these things are done—I write 'em.

FREDDY. But there'll be a deuce of a row in the morning when it's found out!

MAC. No, there won't. Edith doesn't care for silver and diamonds; she's been gorged with 'em all her life. She cares more for those eight little blue bowls that somebody gave her for the kitchen than for anything else in the outfit.

FREDDY (*wisely*). She may not care for them, but she's going to put up an awful howl when they disappear.

MAC. I'll tell her I've put a Secret Service man on the job in order to keep it out of the newspapers.

FREDDY (*firmly*). I don't like it.

MAC. (*leaning back and speaking sarcastically into space*). There are things I would prefer doing on my wedding eve, but I can't help myself. I'd do it for you in a minute, but of course I can't expect you to see it that way. Artists are selfish beasts.

FREDDY. I say, Mac ——

MAC. (*dryly*). I can, of course, call the wedding off. It will be unpleasant for Edith and me, but it will save you a little bother ——

FREDDY (*giving in*). Hang it, I don't mind trying it if you think we can put it over.

MAC. (*enthusiastically*). We've got to put it over, for her sake. There's nothing in the world that I wouldn't do to make that girl happy—even to pawning my wedding silver.

(*Enter* BARNES, C.)

BARNES. Miss Edith says, sir ——

MAC. (*jumping up*). Going this instant, Barnes.

BARNES. Yes, sir. (*Stands at door up* C.)

MAC. (*to* FREDDY *in a savage undertone*). In fifteen minutes—under that window—(*pointing to window* R.) don't fail me! (*He dashes off* C.)

FREDDY (*rising and crossing* L., *desperately*). Thank Heaven, I haven't any more sisters!

BARNES (*up* C.). Beg pardon, sir?

FREDDY (L.). Nothing! Nothing whatever! Why don't you go to bed, Barnes?

BARNES. I'm obliged to wait hup for Miss West, sir. She 'asn't returned yet from the dance.

(*He comes to table* C. *and puts it to rights, replacing chair* L., *etc.* FREDDY *surveys him distractedly.*)

FREDDY. Of course. Just my cursed luck!

BARNES. When she do return, sir, I shall shut up the 'ouse and retire.

FREDDY. Shut up the house?

BARNES. Yes, sir. Set the burglar alarms on the doors and windows, sir.

FREDDY (*despairingly*). Oh, yes, of course, the burglar alarms!

BARNES. With so much silver about, we can't be too careful, sir. There's the jewels, sir. And silver, they say, is particularly tempting to thieves; so easy to 'andle, you know, sir.

FREDDY. Easy!

BARNES. To get rid of, I mean, sir.

FREDDY. Oh!

BARNES. Anything more, sir?

FREDDY. No, I'm going to bed. Immediately! Now! This moment! Good-night, Barnes.

(*Exit,* L.)

BARNES (*at table*). Good-night, Mr. Frederick. (*Shakes his head perplexedly.*) It strikes me that that young man do get more and more hexcitable every day. I presume it's the hinflooence of hart!

(*Bell rings off* C. *Exit* BARNES, C., *returning immediately, ushering in* SALLY WEST. *He takes her cloak.*)

SALLY (*coming down* L.). Is it very late, Barnes?

BARNES (*up* C. *at door*). No, Miss West; only a little after eleven.

SALLY. I suppose everybody's gone to bed?

BARNES. Yes, miss.

SALLY (*crossing* R. *to window*). Barnes, there's a man outside. I noticed him as I got out of the car.

BARNES. Mr. McArthur has just left, miss.

SALLY (*looking out window* R.). This man hasn't left; he's standing out there now. Look!

BARNES (*crossing to window* R., *looking out*). I think it's the night watchman, miss. He has horders to look in on us every ten minutes while the silver's in the 'ouse, miss.

SALLY (*relieved, turning from window*). I'm glad of that. It would be dreadful if anything were to happen to all those lovely things.

BARNES (*at window* R.). He's very hefficient, miss—the night watchman.

SALLY. I hope so. (*Notices box on small table* R.) Oh, is that another present?

(*She goes to table, picks up box and sits in chair* R. *of table* C.)

BARNES. Yes, miss. Miss Edith gave orders, miss, that you were to 'ave coffee and sandwiches when you came in. Shall I serve them 'ere?

SALLY (*still interested in the box*). Yes, please, Barnes. (*Exit* BARNES, C., *taking* SALLY'S *cloak with him.*) How thoughtful of Edie! (*Puts the box on the table* C., *sits, continues dreamily.*) What a lucky thing she is! If I owned one-fifth of the wonderful things that have surged into this house these last few days, I should never raise my eyes without expecting to see a horrible looking robber trying to steal them! (*She looks up, and sees* FREDDY, *who, with his hat pulled down over his eyes, and a striped laundry bag swung over his shoulder, peers into the room* L. *He stops in horror as she screams.*) Oh!

FREDDY (*at door* L., *wildly*). Don't! Don't holler! It's only me!

SALLY. You!

FREDDY (*taking off his hat and coming in*). Yes. Just going out for a walk. Around the block.

SALLY (*coldly*). Don't let me detain you.

FREDDY. No, I won't, thanks.

(*He tries to edge past her up* C. *but she sees the bag.*)

SALLY. What in the world——

FREDDY. It—it's my laundry!

SALLY (*unconvinced*). Yes, it looks like laundry.

FREDDY (L. C.). It is laundry. Barnes puts it up and leaves it on the front steps so that the Chink can get it early in the morning.

SALLY. How very odd!

FREDDY. Yes, Chinks are odd, you know. "Ways that are dark," and all that sort of thing.

SALLY. I should think you'd be afraid that somebody would steal it. But I suppose he watches it.

FREDDY (*alarmed*). He? Who?

SALLY. The man outside. Barnes says he's the night watchman.

FREDDY (*in horror*). Barnes?

SALLY. Yes, I saw him lurking out there when I came in.

FREDDY. The fool!

SALLY (R. *of table*). I thought right away of burglars, so I told Barnes, and he recognized him.

FREDDY (*coming to* L. *of table*). Recognized him!

SALLY. He's supposed to keep going around the house every ten minutes all night.

FREDDY. The deuce he is!

SALLY. Don't let me detain you if you're going out. I'm just having a bit of supper here before I go to bed.

FREDDY (*in discouragement*). Thanks. I don't believe I'll go. I don't feel very well.

(*Sits* L. *of table.*)

SALLY. Perhaps you'll have a cup of coffee?

FREDDY. Perhaps I'd better.

(*Hangs the bag very cautiously on the back of his chair.*)

SALLY. You're very careful of it, seems to me.

FREDDY. It—it's got some of my best clothes in it.

SALLY (*blankly*). Oh! (*Enter* BARNES, C., *with tray containing coffee and sandwiches for two. He places it on the table* C.) Mr. Frederick is going to have some, too, Barnes.

BARNES. I thought I 'eard Mr. Frederick's voice, miss, so I brought two cups.

FREDDY. Thanks.

(BARNES *serves them.*)

SALLY. Mr. Frederick is worried about the man outside, too, Barnes. Are you quite sure it's the night watchman?

BARNES. Quite, miss. However, if you wish, I'll call to 'im and make certain.

FREDDY (L. *of table, wildly*). No!

SALLY (R. *of table*). But ——

FREDDY (*hedging*). He's a good old soul, that watchman, and I'm not going to have him nagged.

BARNES. Very well, sir.

(*Exit* BARNES, C.)

SALLY (*drinking coffee*). You needn't be so savage about it. I'm only thinking of Edith. It would be terrible if anything were to happen to all those lovely presents.

FREDDY. Awful.

SALLY (*touching package on table*). And here's another, a whopper! What do you suppose is in it?

FREDDY. Let's open it and see.

SALLY (*shocked*). Open other people's packages?

FREDDY. It's only Edie.

SALLY (*longingly*). You're sure she won't mind?

FREDDY. Sure. And there might be something valuable in it.

SALLY. Valuable?

FREDDY (*in some confusion*). Something it wouldn't do to leave around, you know.

SALLY. That's so; perhaps we'd better.

(*Tries to untie knot.*)

FREDDY (*struck with brilliant idea*). Tell you what, let's open it in the smoking-room. (*Indicates it at* L.) You go in and get the paper off and I'll come and tell you if it's valuable.

SALLY. No, it's much cozier here. You open it.

(*He cuts the knot; she sips her coffee.*) If it's silver, I'll take it up and put it with the rest. I'm going to take a look at them before I go to bed.

FREDDY (*forgetting the package in his horror*). Oh, say, don't go to bed yet! We're having such a splendid time.

SALLY. Are we?

FREDDY. Of course. I've never had a chance to talk to you by yourself, you know.

SALLY. I don't think you've tried very hard. You have seemed to avoid me a very large part of the time.

FREDDY (*genuinely amazed*). What!

SALLY (*sweetly*). Yes. As they do people who have smallpox, you know.

FREDDY. Oh, I say, Miss Sally, that's just my manner! I've always had a disagreeable manner.

SALLY. So the girls told me, but I wouldn't believe it; Edith is so charming.

FREDDY. Anybody can be charming if she's a girl.

SALLY. If you think us charming, why do you hate us so?

FREDDY. Why, I—I ——

SALLY. Oh, yes, you do; Edith said so. (*With elaborate carelessness.*) Of course, it's nothing to me. There's no real reason why you should not hate me if you want to.

FREDDY (*wildly*). I don't want to hate you! The man who could hate you ought to be run in by the police!

SALLY (*as he stops in horror*). What's the matter?

FREDDY (*dully*). Nothing. It just occurred to me how unpleasant it must be to be run in by the police.

SALLY. Of course it is, but you needn't worry about it. (*He opens the package and takes out a large and extremely ugly china ornament.*) What in the world ——

FREDDY (*reading card*). "With fondest nuptial wishes." Mrs. Spencer-Jordan.

SALLY (*awed*). And she probably paid a lot of money for it!

FREDDY (*stuffing it back into box*). Not she. You

don't know Mrs. Spencer-Jordan. She got stung with it at a church bazaar.

SALLY (*timidly*). Perhaps it's a work of art!

FREDDY (*jamming the paper savagely around it*). Who wants works of art for wedding presents? What we want is something solid. Something with a practical money value. Something ——

SALLY. What a horrible way to talk about wedding presents!

FREDDY. Not at all. What do we give wedding presents for but to start a young couple along their way in life? Suppose something happens, and he has to realize on his assets? What's he going to do with a lot of bum heads and water-colors and pincushions?

SALLY. When a man can command the prices that James McArthur does for his books, nothing is going to happen. It's not like pictures.

FREDDY (*darkly*). Oh, I don't know! They have their ups and downs as well as the rest of us. They ——

(*He stops suddenly as a handkerchief, tied to a cane, is waved threateningly through the open window* R., *back of* SALLY.)

SALLY. What perfect nonsense! As though ——

FREDDY (*cutting in rapidly*). Oh, I'm only speaking in a general way, of course. Nobody thinks old Mac's ever going broke.

(*A fist is seen to shake through the window curtains,* R.)

SALLY (*innocently*). And he's such a dear! I could have picked out a handsomer man for Edie, but not a nicer one, I'm sure.

FREDDY. Yes, I think myself that looks are Mac's weak point.

SALLY. Edie says he's so particular about his literary reputation. He wrote a moving picture scenario for that big competition out west and wouldn't send it in under his own name.

FREDDY. Yes. He sent it under mine.

SALLY. Suppose it takes the prize?

FREDDY. It won't. It's under my name.

SALLY. Don't be so pessimistic! Have some more coffee?

FREDDY. I suppose I might as well.

SALLY (*handing it to him*). You won't sleep tonight.

FREDDY. I don't expect to. (*Pause—he rallies his forces desperately.*) I'm going to sit up and—and think about you.

SALLY. What an absurd thing to do! What are you going to think?

FREDDY. About all the time I've wasted, not knowing how—how agreeable girls can be.

SALLY (*encouragingly*). Yes?

FREDDY. Especially girls who come from out of town—girls you don't know very well!

SALLY (*smiling*). Yes?

FREDDY (*with sudden shyness*). That's all! That's all I'm going to think!

SALLY. I should think that would hardly pay you for sitting up all night.

FREDDY (*rising and leaning on the table for aid*). Unless—unless—I say, will you let me paint you some day when all this fuss is over? That is, if I'm still painting?

SALLY. I shan't be here, you know, when all this fuss is over.

FREDDY (*dramatically*). I'll come wherever you are. Gunpowder Springs—Bloody Gulch—I don't care where it is—I'll come.

SALLY (*with dignity*). I live in Kansas City.

FREDDY. Well, I can stand that. Any place you live in ought to be all right. Will you let me come?

SALLY. Perhaps ——

FREDDY. There's a lot of things I'd like to say to you when—when my mind is free!

SALLY. When your mind is free?

FREDDY. Yes. It's been overworked on this affair—strained—I don't know how I'm coming out of it—but if I do come—will you promise ——

(*He stops.*)

SALLY (*shyly*). Promise what, Freddy?

FREDDY (*desperately*). Why, you know, I've always been sort of—sort of a fool about girls ——

SALLY (*stiffening*). A fool about girls?

FREDDY. Yes, shy, you know, and all that sort of thing. But the minute you came into this house ——

SALLY. Yes?

FREDDY. I felt as if—well—as if I'd been run over—or something like that!

SALLY. I knew there was something the matter with you, Freddy, but I didn't realize ——

FREDDY. No, no, I could see you didn't, but you do, now, don't you?

SALLY. I—I'm trying to.

FREDDY. You see, I am really perfectly dippy about you—maudlin—why, even the way you cough—or sneeze ——

SALLY (*tenderly*). Really, Freddy?

FREDDY. Oh, there's no doubt about it! It's the only thing that nerves me when I think about that church aisle to-morrow night. If it was any other girl I'd leave town. I want you to promise me that you'll marry me instantly—as soon as my mind's free!

(*In leaning over the table, his foot strikes the chair so that the laundry bag and the chair both capsize. There is a compromising jingle of knives and forks.* FREDDY *seizes the bag and holds it pressed to his breast, at bay, while she stares in amazement.*)

SALLY. What's that?

FREDDY (*faintly*). Laundry!

SALLY. Rubbish! There's something in that bag.

FREDDY. Of course there is. There's shirts and cuffs and collars and ——

SALLY. Didn't you hear it?

FREDDY. I—I don't hear very well—always.

SALLY (*severely*). Who packed that bag?

FREDDY. Why—why ——

SALLY. You said that Barnes did.

FREDDY. He—that is—he did, of course.

SALLY (*slowly*). That's why he was going to put it on the front steps. That's why he wasn't afraid of the man outside. The man's a confederate.

FREDDY. What!

SALLY. Don't be so stupid. Didn't you hear something clink in that bag? I tell you, Barnes is trying to smuggle Edith's silver out of the house.

FREDDY. Do—do you really think so?

SALLY. I know it. Don't you read the newspapers? Don't you know that lots and lots of butlers are just criminals, who come over here and prey on our innocent rich? (*Rises.*) Give me that!

FREDDY. No. I won't have him exposed. He's the best butler we've ever had. I don't care if he is a thief.

SALLY. And to think that any one could be vile enough to impose on such good nature! Please, Freddy! We must be quite certain before we do anything.

FREDDY. Do anything?

SALLY. Yes, report it—send for the police.

FREDDY. The police!

SALLY (*coming around to him in front of table and seizing the bag*). We must know the truth. (*She takes out two or three large silver pieces, and a lot of table silver, wrapped carelessly in a flowered silk kimono.*) Oh, the fiend! Wrapped in poor Edie's own kimono! I didn't suppose there was such wickedness in the world! He ought to be hung.

FREDDY (*wildly*). Stop! You mustn't! You mustn't touch the body—I mean, the evidence until the police come. You'll ruin everything.

(*He grabs the bag from her.*)

SALLY. But, I ——

FREDDY (*hastily repacks the bag and puts it on table* C.). Put it all back—just the way it was—wrap it up—now, listen!

SALLY (*nervously*). Yes?

FREDDY. We mustn't let him know that we're on till we've found out about the man outside. You go down the hall and listen, and if you hear Barnes coming, you—you whistle ——

SALLY (*desperately*). I can't whistle, Freddy!

FREDDY (*severely*). Then sneeze! I'll lean out of the window and holler at the chap; if he's the watchman, he won't mind; but if he's a confederate, he'll run. Then we'll know where we stand. See?

SALLY. But he may not run—he may shoot!

FREDDY. Pooh!

SALLY (*solicitously*). I—I wouldn't like him to shoot an arm off you, Freddy.

FREDDY (*with a wave of his hand*). Tut tut!

SALLY. Or a leg ——

FREDDY (*patting her shoulder*). You must be brave.

SALLY. Suppose—suppose he kills you?

FREDDY (*quite overcome, puts his arm around her*). He shan't kill me, darling!

SALLY (*snuggling up to him*). You know, I didn't mean all those wretched things I said to you a while ago!

FREDDY. Of course not. How could you?

SALLY. And you'll be dreadfully careful, won't you?

FREDDY. You bet I will.

SALLY (*suddenly*). And I'll take this, so that he won't be tempted to do anything rash.

(*Seizes the bag and runs off* C.)

FREDDY (*in horror*). Hi, come back with that! Sally!

(*Starts up stage after her, when* MAC.'S *head appears in the window,* R.)

MAC. Hist! (FREDDY *rushes back to window,* R.) You young idiot, where's that silver?

FREDDY. She's got it.

MAC. What!

FREDDY. I did my best, Mac, but I ——

MAC. (*wildly*). Yes, you did. Sitting round gabbing while I'm freezing to death out here. Maybe you think the middle of January is a pleasant time of year to hang onto a window sill and listen to two fools spooning while your whole life is wabbling in the balance!

FREDDY (*wrathfully*). Spooning?

MAC. Twice I've nearly been spotted by the night watchman going round, and he's due again in half a minute. What are you going to do about it?

FREDDY. I can't do anything about it, Mac; she's got it. She thinks Barnes stole it.

MAC. Do you mean to tell me that you've deliberately given my wedding silver to a girl that you happen to be smitten on, while I waited shivering—freezing—dying—out in the cold for it?

FREDDY. I didn't give it to her; she took it away from me. You wouldn't have me use violence toward a helpless girl, in my own house, would you?

MAC. I don't care what you do. It's half-past eleven and the place will be closed in half an hour. Look here ——

FREDDY. I won't do another thing. I won't have a chance. Poor old Barnes, a nice fix you've got him into!

MAC. You got him into it, you mean; if you'd paid attention to business instead of making love to girls ——

FREDDY. Hush!

MAC. I didn't hear anything about waiting five years, either. "Won't you marry me instantly?"

(*A wild fit of sneezing from outside door up* C.)

FREDDY (*furiously*). They're coming—both of 'em! Listen, Mac, here's my latch key; you can let yourself in and steal your darned old silver yourself. I'm going to reform.

(*Holds out key.* MAC. *takes key and disappears, shaking his fist at* FREDDY. SALLY, *still holding bag, rushes in* C., *runs down* R. *and clutches* FREDDY.)

SALLY. He's coming! He's in the dining-room now! Was it the confederate?

FREDDY. No, it was the watchman. I put him on. We're saved!

SALLY (*sinking into chair*). Oh!

FREDDY. Give me this and look as though nothing had happened. We want to catch him with the goods! Here's a good place to put it.

(*He takes bag and places it on chair near door* L. SALLY *comes down* R. *and sits* R. *of table.* FREDDY *comes and sits* L. *of table. Both he and* SALLY *pick up their coffee cups and try to appear unconscious.* BARNES *enters,* C.)

SALLY. You may take away the things, Barnes.

BARNES (*coming down* C. *to table*). Yes, miss.

(*As he puts the things on the tray,* SALLY *watches him furtively;* FREDDY *watches* SALLY; BARNES *is unconscious.*)

FREDDY (*nervously*). Very good coffee, Barnes!

BARNES. Thank you, sir. Very good of you to say so, sir. (*Pause.*)

SALLY. Did you make it yourself?

BARNES. Yes, miss. In my last place, with young Lord Derbyshire, I used to do quite a bit of cooking.

SALLY. Why—ahem—why did you leave Lord Derbyshire, Barnes? (*Then, a bit scared.*) He—he sounds rather nice!

BARNES. Yes, miss. His Lordship's aunt took it into her 'ead to get married, miss, and there was a bit of trouble at the wedding; and after that 'Is Lordship didn't 'ave no need for a valet, miss.

SALLY (*glancing at* FREDDY, *who shrivels up*). Trouble? What do you mean, Barnes?

BARNES. There was a diamond sunburst lost, miss, and some other things that the ladies were wearing, and they 'appened to be found on His Lordship; so they 'ad to send 'im out to Australia to 'ush it up, miss.

(FREDDY'S *cup comes down on the table with a crash;* SALLY *looks at him with a dawning horror in her eyes;*

BARNES *takes the cup from* FREDDY.) Such things are very unpleasant when they happen in families, miss.

FREDDY (*weakly*). That'll do, Barnes, you may go!

BARNES. Very well, sir.

(*Exit,* C., *with tray.*)

SALLY (*staring accusingly at* FREDDY). In families! Wedding presents!

FREDDY. You oughtn't to encourage Barnes to burble on like that; it isn't discipline.

SALLY. Discipline!

FREDDY. They always look down on you if you talk to 'em too much, you know.

SALLY. Oh!

FREDDY. Sally ——

SALLY (*hysterically*). Not a word! To think that I've been so blind—so stupid ——

FREDDY. Sally, dear, if you don't mind ——

SALLY. Don't you dare call me "Sally, dear," or even "Sally"! Don't you speak to me! Oh, how I've been deceived in you!

FREDDY. In me?

SALLY (*furiously*). Yes, in you! You—with your shyness, and your slyness, and your being a fool about girls! You—you—living lie!

FREDDY. Look here, you can't say those things to me—nobody can say those things to me—and get away with it!

SALLY. And I believed all that rot about your laundry and the Chinaman and all you said about poor Barnes being a thief ——

FREDDY. All I said ——

SALLY. All your vile suspicions!

FREDDY (*bewildered*). My suspicions?

SALLY. Have you no conscience whatever?

FREDDY. Sally, look here, if I tell you ——

SALLY. I wouldn't believe you—no matter what you told me—I wouldn't believe you! (*She begins to sob; he stares at her in helpless despair. A hand reaches through the curtain at* L., *carefully seizes the*

laundry bag and withdraws it. The bell rings; SALLY *jumps up.*) Freddy, is—is it the police?

FREDDY (*dejectedly*). Hanged if I know!

SALLY. Freddy, could they—do they know anything else about you that they could arrest you for?

FREDDY. I—I hope not.

SALLY. That man outside? Would he give you up to the police?

FREDDY (*savagely*). He'd better not!

SALLY. Then there is hope for you?

FREDDY. It doesn't look like it, but if you'll stand by me ——

SALLY. Yes, I will. I hate you for doing it, but I'll stand by you for—for Edie's sake! How shall we put it back?

FREDDY. Put what back?

SALLY. The —— (*She sees that the bag is gone.*) It's gone! The confederate! He's in there!

(*She starts toward smoking-room; he rises and stops her.*)

FREDDY. Wait, let me go!

SALLY. No, I'm not afraid. I ——

(*Enter* BARNES, C., *with telegram. They pause.*)

BARNES (*coming down* R. *to* FREDDY). Telegram for you, sir.

(*Hands it to* FREDDY, *who opens it mechanically.* BARNES *goes up* C.)

FREDDY (*reads*). "Mr. Frederick Fanning: Your scenario has won the $10,000 prize. Have wired money to your account, First National Bank. Who the deuce are you, anyhow? X. Y. Z. Film Co."

(FREDDY *sinks into chair at* L. *of table;* MAC., *bag over his shoulder, rushes into the room from* L. *and snatches the telegram from* FREDDY.)

MAC. Give me that!

SALLY (*retreating to* R. *of table*). The confederate! Mac! Barnes, what is the matter?

BARNES. Can't say, miss, but it looks hodd.

MAC. (*wildly*). Ten thousand dollars! We'll stay in Palm Beach all winter—at my expense! Whoopee! (*To* BARNES.) Let's go wake up Edith.

BARNES (*stolidly*). It's extremely late, sir.

FREDDY (*rising and seizing the bag*). Never mind the ten thousand—you give me those wedding presents! (*Hands bag to* SALLY.) There, darling, you can take them up-stairs and put them away yourself. Only say that you forgive me. (*Goes to her.*)

SALLY. Yes, Freddy, but—but what for?

MAC. For helping me steal my own wedding silver. My publishers fell down on me at the last moment, and I had to corrupt my future brother-in-law in order that Edith might not be deprived of a wedding trip. Being a duffer, he queered the whole game. Come on, Barnes, let's fox trot!

(*He runs up* C., *seizes the dazed* BARNES *and does a lively step with him, while* SALLY *turns to* FREDDY.)

SALLY. Freddy!

FREDDY. Sally!

(*They rush into each other's arms.*)

SALLY. Promise me you'll never do such a thing again!

FREDDY. Never! I seal the promise.

(*Kisses her.*)

MAC. Love interest be hanged! I'm going to write the rippingest detective yarn you ever read, and Barnes' Lord Derbyshire is going to be the villain.

SALLY. Just so you leave my Freddy out, you may do as you please!

CURTAIN

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